

The Individual

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MEETINGS

Wednesday, 1st February 1995 at 7 pm

Professor Antony Flew

At the Red Lion, Whitehall (near Parliament Square), London SW1

Antony Flew was professor of philosophy at the University of Reading and is a prolific author of books on many topics. His latest is "Shephard's Warning" (the Shephard being our present Secretary of State for Education), a review of which appears elsewhere in this issue. The main theme is getting the schools back on course and why radical educational reform is necessary. Also how Kenneth Baker's obtuseness, when he was in charge, in appointing only establishment figures to key posts frustrated earlier attempts at genuine reform. This will be a very interesting and informative talk. As this is an 'open' meeting, members are invited to bring friends. [Committee members only: please note that we meet at 5.30pm.]

Wednesday 26th April 1995

Luncheon, House of Lords. Speaker: Neil Hamilton MP

EDITORIAL

Very few people are actually indifferent to religion. Some believe in one religion so fervently that they are prepared to kill and die for it. Some spend a lot of money on it; most profess belief in God or some 'higher power'; a relatively few people are serious atheists.

Recently the churches, or church spokesmen, have had some serious comments to make on political issues, mostly in criticism of the present and previous government, even though the Church of England was once thought of as the 'Conservative party at prayer'. The leader of the opposition, Tony Blair, claims to be a serious Christian, and some Continental political parties include 'Christian' in their titles.

The relationship of religion to freedom is often ambiguous. Believers often assert that their religion

has given them 'true freedom' and that anybody who joins them and 'sees the light' will be similarly rewarded. On the other hand non-believers usually find the influence of religion oppressive if its demands are expressed in the law and enforced by state power.

It is nevertheless interesting and worth noting that both sides take it for granted that freedom of some sort is desirable. It is in the interpretation that opinions differ — and sometimes feelings run high. So to give readers some ideas and information on this topic, several of the articles in this issue of 'The Individual' are on subjects which concern religion in some sense.

MORALITY IS MORE THAN ME

Rev. Bryan Rippin

The Christian faith is grounded in the social experience of a Semitic people for whom individual righteousness and national well-being were indivisible. When the prophets saw that things were going badly for Israel, they either castigated the king for unfaithfulness, or the king's prophets for being sycophantic or the king's people for dealing unfairly with each other in the markets, in the law courts, or in personal relationships. In the Ten Commandments there are four rules about the people's relationship with God but six about personal relationships (Exodus 20, 1-17). The Sermon on the Mount where Jesus speaks about the poor whom God blesses and about the rich whom God warns, is the focus of all Christian behaviour (Matthew 5, 1-11).

Market morality as practised by four successive Conservative governments insists on economics being the prime base for human relationships. As a consequence and with considerable success the one has been separated from the many. Margaret Thatcher — influenced early in her life by her Methodist upbringing and later by her mentor, Keith Joseph, who was of the Jewish tradition, has fiercely argued for the individual's right for the freedom to achieve. The justification was that the generation of wealth from whatever source and by whatever means, ultimately like manna from heaven, provides wealth for all the masses. Lady Thatcher has quoted the dictum of John Wesley, "gain all you can" so that you can "save all you can". Her present considerable wealth points to the fact that this principle has certainly worked for her. She forgot of course that John Wesley added a third principle of Christian prudence, namely "so that you can give all you can" ("The Use of Money", in 'Forty Four Sermons', 1944, p576). Thus the Christian motive for money making is not the accumulation of wealth or even its investment, but its distribution. Personal success must be directly related if there are some Christian ethics around, to the public need and to the public good.

Pure 'marketism' has been painfully revealed in all its ugly greed in the recent decisions of British Gas to inflate its Chief Executive's salary by 75% and at the same time to decrease the wages of its high street employees who, at £13,000 a year are considered to be uncompetitive against the wages paid to other high street employees. When Jesus told the story of labourers who were paid the same amount for varying hours of work he was emphasising social need. A family at home still needed bread however long their breadwinner had worked (Matthew 20, 1). When the prophets expressed their anger at the extreme wealth of the powerful and the poverty of the poor, they were emphasising that wealth and justice have a basic

dynamic relationship. As John Wesley says in the sermon already quoted, we were brought into being and placed in this world "not as a proprietor but as a steward".

The focus of Christian social responsibility has always been the teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God. The term has never been easily understood and is a constant theme of contemporary theology. Jesus' own understanding of the rule of God is so ambiguous that He continually speaks of it by analogy or parable. Whatever it meant to him it certainly had an intensely *personal* meaning. God knows about every sparrow that falls and numbers every hair on every head (Luke 12, 7). But the personal is always treated as part of an entire social coherence. All the time He worked out the rule within the companionship of His friends, on the streets, amongst the crowds on the hills, in people's homes. Again and again He emphasises a morality that involves personal dignity and the solidarity of the group.

The rule of God cannot be separated from the basic purposes of God, from His intentions as creator. Our new understanding of the importance of the environment for the survival of the earth and its inhabitants; our rediscovery through technology that we are all interdependent confirms this — just as primitive people have always known it. Just as the earth and its environment depend on this vital inter-relationship of all living creatures and the plants which populate it, so the survival of life depends on getting the right balance between the desires of the individual and the needs of the corporate dimension of life to which every element of creation contributes.

For such reasons as these I believe there are no individual rights that can exist without reference to the whole life of humanity and its environment. In the last fifteen years a political and socio-economic battle has been going on between the proper wish to preserve the state and also to free the individual from its unreasonable demands. But a new machinery of state has grown out of this desire and far from helping to achieve that purpose it is preventing it. The irony is that the effort to secure such freedom has in fact created a new tyranny and the deregulation has only been achieved by a whole mass of *new* regulations: particularly the effects of the numerous QUANGOs which are accountable only to ministers of state, the privatised industries which are insufficiently regulated, and the immense centralised power now in the hands of government. All of this — far from ensuring new freedom — has created a miasma of power which threatens to generate a sophisticated form of anarchy. In fifteen years the government has in fact gained a degree of power which has robbed

people of a sense of their own accountability to something more than to their own interests. There is insufficient focus to our life.

The 'kingdom' idea in the New Testament Gospels contains the evocative theme of an ethic of love — for self, for God, for righteousness — as well as a theology of power based on mutual responsibility. The failure of the Thatcherite revolution is that there has been too much concern for a licence that is unbalanced by a sense of responsibility; too much self love and no neighbour love; too little reflection about the nature of power and how it is responsibly used; too much patrimony for those who succeed and too much contempt for those who don't. A person alone is too narrow a context in which to build a philosophy of individual freedom. The context must comprehend all people; the rich and the poor, all nations, the whole earth. St. Paul had some funny ideas but several brilliant ones. For example he liked to call the Church the "Body of Christ". He was talking about a holistic philosophy of human nature. There is no other. God sets people free. That's where the Judean tradition begins and that is the heart of the Christian understanding of Christ. But that is only the beginning of the story. How the freedom can be used to honour God and for the wellbeing of the wider community is the real issue.

Adrian Hastings, the Professor of Theology in the University of Leeds, in his book "The Theology of a Protestant Catholic" describes Jesus as a prophet. "His call for disciples is, above all, for men and women to take on the task of prophesy, its fierce intellectual honesty, its bearing of the burdens of the weak, its condition of marginality, its promise of unpopularity, its refusal to take refuge in the temple, but its equal refusal to see the world through the spectacles of the world's own justifying ideologies" (p 67). That's a good statement with which to begin a Christian definition of the individual. S/he is a person who discovers his/her personhood not merely in the temple, the law court, the boardroom, the lobby, but always amongst the people — and for them.

Rev. Bryan Rippin represents the Free Churches on the Government's Inner Cities Religious Council. He is Chairman (the Methodist equivalent of Bishop) of the Sheffield District of the Methodist Church and has been a minister for the last 38 years, working in Bristol, Bradford, Nottingham, Wolverhampton and Poplar in East London. Also multi-faith and community ministry experience and likes living in cities, having chosen, when he came to Sheffield in 1990, to live in a central area instead of the more fashionable ones. He is author of "The Christian Juggler", published in 1985.

GOD & MORALITY — HELP OR HINDRANCE?

Paul Anderton

Do you remember doing Venn diagrams at school? They were helpful in solving problems such as: A certain political party had 315 members; 125 said they put their principles above personal ambition and 208 said they put the interests of Britain above party loyalty; how many put *both* their principles and British interests above other considerations? If you draw two overlapping rings, one to represent each group and put the numbers in you see the overlap represents the number required and this makes the solution obvious. Perhaps such a simple case can be solved by 'common sense' anyhow and you don't need the diagram.

But this little visual aid — the Venn diagram of rings to represent sets of ideas some of which might be in several groups — can help outside mathematical puzzles.

Suppose we use the Venn rings to represent the moral precepts and 'values' of various religions? Those of, say, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism would overlap in some respects and not in others. Only Christianity deifies Jesus, only Islam proscribes alcohol. Both Judaism and Islam proscribe eating pork. But there are some rules in common — where

all three Venn rings would overlap. They all forbid murder, theft, neglect of ageing parents, even adultery. And the worship of false gods, except that the 'genuine' god is different in each case.

The arguments and wars between religions are invariably about the beliefs and values outside the overlap — those peculiar to a particular faith and which distinguish that faith from the others.

This is well illustrated by the famous Ten Commandments. The first four are, in effect, threats and encouragements to maintain faith in Christianity itself and its priests and officials. The last six are often quoted (the first four nothing like as often) with the observation that they are 'common sense' anyhow. There is then an implied invitation to believe in the whole religious package, as if the obvious common sense of some simple rules of behaviour were proof that all its other articles of faith were common sense as well.

The practical moral problem is to get people to obey the moral rules for the long-term good of 'society' in those circumstances where individuals can see some short-term benefit for themselves from not doing so. Making some connection between morality

and religion with a system of immediate penalties and rewards for compliance through the reactions of the peer group of believers, has obvious practical benefits.

But there are some serious disadvantages, the main one being the inevitable built-in rigidity. The full package of morality includes a substantial number of add-ons — such as the first four commandments, together with some mundane considerations such as hygiene requirements learned by experience — and these can become outdated. Then if these have been presented as ‘the word of God’ doubt is introduced about the wisdom of the word of God in these respects and this can quickly spread to the ‘common sense’ areas as well. This is the big practical danger of associating morality with religion. In its ‘absolutist’ attitude to social rules in general it can be made to appear ridiculous or capriciously repressive by developments in technology or changes in attitude due simply to increased knowledge. Examples include the effect of economic prosperity in supporting ever growing world population which changes the emphasis from procreation to resource management. So the old religious emphasis on procreation as the

major purpose of sexual relationships, for instance, seems quaint or perverse. So does the demand for redistribution of wealth by state confiscation and doling out foreign aid on political grounds rather than by market trading.

So if you want to know what is ‘true morality’ there are two sources, one pragmatic, the other deductive. The pragmatic is evidently those areas of personal behaviour where the various religions agree — the overlap of the Venn rings. The deduced rules require some careful thought rather than jumping to simplistic conclusions — including sometimes rejecting what seems like common sense because this ‘common sense’ might be the result of limited knowledge and experience.

The Ten Commandments boil down to: (1) Worship no other God; (2) Do not worship idols; (3) Do not take Lord's name in vain; (4) Keep Sabbath holy; (5) Honour your Parents; (6) Do Not Kill; (7) No adultery; (8) No stealing; (9) No False Witness; (10) Do Not covet neighbour's goods. The order in which they are stated is interesting — particularly if it is to be taken as an indication of order of importance.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENT

Mike Plumbe

What is religion? My Chamber's Dictionary gives ‘belief in, recognition of, or an awakened sense of, a higher unseen controlling power or powers, with the emotion and morality connected therewith.’

I strongly support the right of anyone to belong to any religion of his choice. Equally, everyone has the right not to belong to a religion. What I find offensively intrusive is the knock on the door, often on a busy Saturday, from some sect actively recruiting members. Recruitment should be done more subtly, and by example. Recently I was in a restaurant with a friend, and we chatted to an elderly couple nearby. The man let it slip that he was co-founder of a society called ‘CRAFT’. We asked what this was, to be told ‘Can't Remember a Flipping Thing’. Life membership is £5, you get a badge and can buy a tie or scarf, and all proceeds go to charity. We signed up at once.

My own stance on religion is somewhat ambivalent. Brought up in the Anglican faith, I was a chorister, server, bellringer, and (briefly, as I played too many wrong notes) organist. Recently out of curiosity I joined a Humanist association, which debunks all religion as humbug and mythology (it does not deny the moral code implicit in most religions).

Now I'm sitting on the fence. I understand the logic of the humanist argument. A great deal of evil

has been done, and is still being done, in the world in the name of, or because of, religion. Much research work indicates that many of the tenets of organised religion are based on myth. For example, ‘The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail’, a book well worth reading, suggests convincingly that Christ was a distinguished rabbi who was married and had a family, and that his descendants can be traced even today. Many of the Christian festivals can be shown to be based on pagan rituals. Some Jewish customs stem from the practicalities of life in a hot country; they have no truly religious significance, and little relevance now we have refrigerators. Catholics regard the sanctity of life as being paramount, irrespective of the terrible fact that there are far too many humans on this planet. (At the same time they deny their priests the right to reproduce — odd). Moslems need to pray in a certain direction for their prayers to be heard, and Christian churches too are ‘directional’. Many sects need dress codes (saffron or other special robes, shaven or covered heads, dog-collars) to advertise their members' allegiance. What have these things to do with a true, universal spirit?

Certainly the main churches in our country are suffering many difficulties now. Attendances and donations are falling. Priests have been abusing children, divorcing and hoping to remarry, and ‘outed’ as homosexuals. Incidentally, I wonder if

allowing Anglican women to be priests will create a 'Lesbian problem'?

Yet I have met a number of people who derive great comfort from their religion. One woman I knew lost her husband and both her sons in the last war. However, she was deeply religious and she had an air of true peace and serenity about her which influenced everyone she met. I confess I felt much humbled just being in her presence. Even I briefly experienced similar peace, after hearing Billy Graham at Wembley. Worldly pressures I fear soon brought me back to earth.

One friend made a good point, I think. God is said to be omniscient. He knows everything. We then ask him to make choices and decisions for us. Yet he cannot logically be asked to make a choice because a choice implies more than one possible course of action. If he already knows everything, there is

nothing for Him to decide. If He were to decide on anything, he could be changing that which He already knows. Puzzling.

My own conclusion is 'mind over matter'. I believe Humans have the power within themselves to control their lives in a way which really can be peaceful, whatever the outside stresses are. However the technique does not come easily. (I myself was taught a measure of self-hypnosis which in bad times actually does help me, but I am not very good at it.) Where people can find their peaceful way through faith, religion is serving a wonderful purpose. What I hate is the intolerance, humbug and false piety which attends much religious observance.

Above all, people need the freedom to worship or not worship in whatever way suits them, as long as they do no harm to others in the process. And as long as they do not try to proselytise me.

OUR MINISTER FOR ANDEAN PEASANTRY

Matthew Parris

I visited Bolivia in August closely followed by Home Secretary, Michael Howard. His visit produced the usual pictures of the British Home Secretary shaking hands with his opposite numbers in the Andes, and urging them to redouble their efforts to stop the exports of coca and its derivatives. And applause for Mr Howard at the Tory Party conference in Bournemouth for his noble efforts in the war on drugs.

I too applaud his holiday endeavours. On the road to La Paz I had a Damascene conversion to the "world community's" crusade against coca. Chewing some (60 cents a pound from the stall next to the potato sellers in Cochabamba market) I realised that everything I have ever written about the oppression of the South American Indians by the US Drug Enforcement Agency and their lickspittle British government apologists, was wrong.

Howard and his Washington friends are not the scourge of the Bolivian poor at all. They are their godfathers. They, and they alone, are the means of price support to the Andean rural economy, and the massive invisible exports which sustain the Thatcherite miracle of this nation's economic recovery. No wonder Mr Howard and his Bolivian counterparts smile all over their handshakes, for our Home Secretary, by promising to maintain efforts to restrict supply and squeeze the competition, is promising to help to maintain producer prices: the best and most enlightened form of foreign aid devised.

I challenge the Adam Smith Institute to disprove or validate the argument which follows. Coca grows vigorously in hot, sunny, well watered slopes such as

the Andes — and innumerable other places — provide. So do tomatoes. But there are no tomato barons in Bolivia. This is because Mr. Howard will let anybody grow tomatoes. So the price of tomatoes is low. What enhances the price of coca leaves to a level which provides a good living for hundreds of thousands in the Andes — and what enhances the price of refined cocaine to a level which balances Bolivia's trade and permits her to fund health and education projects at home without inflating the currency — is what Mr. Howard went there to promote: the restriction of the world's supply of coca and its derivatives.

Any explosion in the quantity of coca leaves available to world markets — or any increase in the number of producer countries — would lower prices and slash incomes. Both Howard and his South American counterparts have every interest in keeping up the squeeze. Mr Howard, of course, aims officially not just to squeeze but to block the trade. But as a Thatcherite he knows this cannot be done, as the tighter the squeeze, the higher the prices and the keener the producers.

The really dramatic added value, of course, occurs not in the pricing of the leaves but in the hands of the processors, exporters and dealers. They stand to make fortunes. But they also stand to lose their lives or liberty — the risk balancing the reward. That is why I say that in the strict sense of the word, the peasants are the only beneficiaries, for their benefit is not accompanied by any extra risk or effort.

And I do mean that. I hope HM Ambassador in La Paz briefed Mr Howard on the farce he is helping to stage. There is a degree of control of coca planting

here. It would be hard for new growers to enter the market in any quantity. But existing agriculture patterns are mostly undisturbed — except for the occasional showcase arrest of a peasant for the pre-briefed American cameras.

Coca is permitted for domestic consumption. Millions chew it. Nobody can stop it. Nobody really wants to. Leaving an expensive hotel after a meal, we saw the staff spreading an artistic ring of coca leaves around a table display in the lobby. I wonder if Mr. Howard dined there?

He has a useful job to do. The trade is nicely balanced at present. What at present is an orderly market could collapse if too many new producers are let in. So Mr. Howard's visit mattered. We need to preserve the status quo. Peasants get their income, producers and merchants get their reward, and Mr. Howard gets his applause. Everyone's a winner.

Or nearly. Who pays the peasants, the smugglers, the dealers? Who applauds Mr. Howard? You do, stupid! You pay in your stolen cars and car radios; your break-ins; your muggings; your children's brushes with the underworld of drug-related crime. You pay in your fear of crime. You pay in your applause of Mr. Howard. Coca supports his career too. All these things are the natural outcome of the rigged market you sent Mr. Howard to help organise in South America. So — on behalf of the Indian poor in the Andes — thank you.

Matthew Parris writes regularly for 'The Times' and 'Investors Chronicle'. The above is a slightly edited version of his article in 'The Times' of 15th August 1994.

'PROTECTION' THAT IS NOT PROTECTION

Avedon Carol

We have now reached the stage where the words "racist" and "sexist" have replaced "common" and "dirty". It is no longer deemed necessary to analyse the content of words or images, as using one of these two terms is all that is needed to dismiss them. Facts, as a result, are irrelevant, since the emotional effects (on the critic, at least) of certain words and images become the only important meaning. For example, recent claims that a population explosion caused by immigrants (presumably of strange colours) is responsible for rising social problems were never refuted factually (no one pointed out that more people are leaving this country than entering it); it was enough simply to label such claims as "racist" and call for bans on the British National Party. Similarly calls are made to ban the songs produced by rap groups rather than analyse the content of those songs and discuss the social causes leading to such attitudes. The explanation for this is that the contents "offend", so we needn't quibble over whether they represent misapprehensions or even serious concerns about the social milieu.

The effect such language has on the hearer should be obvious; teenagers are no more impressed by being told their sex talk is "sexist" than they were being told it was "dirty"; when young working-class males hear their complaints labelled "racist" it can sound like uncomprehending classist bigotry — from well-fed middle-class and upper-class intellectuals. (They have good reason to; these are, after all, the same intellectuals who use the term "truck driver" to mean "depraved, ignorant lout" and who think there is something perverted about smoking cigarettes,

drinking beer, eating burgers, and admiring big breasts.)

These views, unfortunately, seem to have been roundly promoted by the media and swallowed whole by local councils, not to mention the Labour Party, to such an extent that one might forget entirely that they have nothing to do with the women's liberation movement or the civil rights movement. In fact, they are in direct opposition to the views promoted by these movements in the 1960s and early 1970s. The result has been ripping gashes dividing the two sides of these twinned movements.

Women's liberation principally asked for two things: one was schooling and hiring based on merit rather than on sex; the other was *social* awareness of the attitudes and practices that hurt women specifically (these particularly applied to sexual information and to child-rearing practices). Feminists generally perceived governments as more of a hindrance than a help in these terms; other than enforcement of *merit* hiring, most feminists were unprepared to ask the government for aid. Where governments already provided aid in general, women did ask that this aid be extended to include aid that was directed specifically at women's issues for the support of those who wished to step away from the *status quo* (e.g. that medical coverage should include not just births, but abortion, or that any parental benefits cover both sexes).

But most of the feminist agenda in the late 1960s and early 1970s was directed at educating individuals and institutions; for example, making writers and editors aware that their readers included women who were not satisfied by cardboard cut-outs appearing as

females, or reminding corporations and their advertisers that not all of their customers for cars, houses, or stereos were men. No one wanted laws to enforce this.

In most cases, feminists demanded relaxation on existing legislation rather than new legislation — this was particularly the case with regard to abortion and obscenity legislation, both of which were seen to specifically harm women by restraints on our own control of our bodies and the exploration of our own lives. Obscenity legislation in particular inhibited both sexual exploration and reproductive information. While labelling parts of our bodies “obscene”, it protected no one.

Women recognised that growing criminological research demonstrated that sex offenders came from sexually repressive backgrounds and saw less pornography than other men. The same attitudes that create guilt and fear in response to pornography were fundamental to the mentality of the rapist. For this reason, anti-pornography campaigns were in and of themselves a *danger* to women, and a concerted effort had to be made to counteract the damage by extending the positive sexual images available in the commercial sector. The one area where government aid was sought in this respect was with regard to the true mechanics, dangers, and rewards of sex in all its glory.

The trend to reduce censorship and improve sex education has been reversed during the 1980s and 1990s to date. The two excuses for this have been that sexual material may “offend” and that children must be protected from, rather than informed about, sex. Hysteria about video ‘nasties’ and child pornography has created a polluted discourse in which emotive (and often false) claims about child abuse and other sex crime and violence are used to manipulate the public into increasing demands for censorship and expanded police powers to enforce such censorship.

At the foundation of many of these claims (aside from the charge of “offence”), is an erroneous belief that sex crime has risen markedly since the 1960s. In fact, sex crime is more talked about and has earned real recognition since the 1960s, with the result that cases are more likely to be reported, but there is no evidence of an increase in the percentage of these crimes actually being committed. Demographic changes in the 1960s — principally, the fact that the enormous baby-boom generation had reached the age at which men are most likely to commit violent assaults — gave the appearance that crime had increased because of the sheer numbers; per head of total population, the percentage increase appeared high. However, the evidence is that within that age group (roughly from 15 to 34), the percentage of men who became racists did not increase. A recent “mini-boom” when baby-boomers’ offspring began to enter this age group also showed what was perceived to be an increase in crime; once again, there is no evidence

that young males showed any greater likelihood to commit violent crime than any other generation of men. What did increase was a propensity to lurid and detailed journalism about such crime that had not been seen at such levels since before the second world war. The only other factor that appears to be related to fluctuations in the actual rate of crime is economic: crime rates do shadow the unemployment rates. So, despite the claims of moral rightists and other anti-porn campaigners, it cannot legitimately be claimed that the “permissive morality” of the sexually licentious ‘60s can be held responsible for increases in rape, abuse or other violence.

There is, however, one factor that accounts for an increase in the number of *apparent* crimes, which is the simple fact that more things are illegal than ever before. Some of these are crimes because their evil had been recognized for the first time — marital rape would be an example, previously treated as a right of the husband in those good old days when things were, we are told, so much more perfect than they are today. But marital rape is not a crime that clogs the courts very often. Non-marital rape is more often recognized even when the victim is not a virgin, and child abuse was once hardly recognized at all, while now it is seen as a serious crime. In this sense, one could say the situation has improved, although collateral damage can be seen in the increasing number of cases in which the innocent sex play that occurs between children is now being treated as child abuse, thus dragging children through the courts for no good reason. There is also a problem in false charges of abuse, which expose children to traumatizing “examinations” that probably do more harm than the crime itself might have done.

For a brief period in the early 1970s, restrictions on “obscenity” were so reduced in Britain that it was actually legal to buy hard-core pornography. New laws were passed in a relatively short time such that it became increasingly difficult to procure photographs or films of adults engaged in ordinary sex without violation of the law. In recent years, aggressive campaigns by an enlarged Obscene Publications Squad led by Michael Hames have made it dangerous even to possess erotic materials or any materials involving nudity legally. Homes have been raided on no provocation and announcements appear in the Press of the capture of what always appears to be Britain’s largest porn ring, paedophile ring, or child porn ring; in fact, few of these seizures involve more than one person, and those that do rarely involve any of the claimed materials. “Snuff videos” found in Birmingham turn out to be an old horror movie; “900 pieces of child pornography” turn out to be 900 pieces of adult pornography; “the world’s largest child porn ring” turns out to be a children’s portrait photographer who includes naturists among his clients and has nothing to do with pornography of any sort; “Britain’s largest porn ring” (or, alternatively, a

"child snuff" ring) turned out to be a group of adult male homosexuals who happened to video a few private SM sex parties for their private use (the "disgusting, violent" acts portrayed in the press were in fact harmless, it was ultimately revealed; what the press seemed to find most horrible and what was described as "driving a nail through a foreskin" turned out to be the placement of a nail through an already existing, healed piercing). And so on.

Anti-porn campaigners in the OPS and the customs service claim to "watch child pornography all day long," which is interesting, since there aren't enough paedophiles in all of Europe to account for that much child porn; in fact, this material is rare and even paedophiles are not terribly interested in pictures of children being raped (they are *attracted* to children, but, like most people, they fantasize *consensual* sex with the partners of their dreams). Given the nature of already existing child porn laws, in addition to laws against sex with children themselves, only a fool would attempt to get rich selling material that is so much more likely to get them landed in jail than to make them wealthy. Perhaps we should ask why this sudden, rabid anti-child porn campaign has so recently emanated from two groups who stand in severe danger of losing their jobs with planned cuts (to Customs as a result of the

trade barriers coming down, and to the OPS in a money-saving drive).

And now, in the wake of these calls to protect the children, we have the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, banning public protest and dance parties ("raves") held *even with the permission of the owners* and away from the earshot of neighbours on private land, and allowing the police to enter your home and take all your media (including your computer) without a warrant in case you are in violation of section 2 of the Obscene Publications Act 1959 (which refers, by the way, to *adult* pornography). Sex education, meanwhile, is being reduced. Women who claim to be feminists have achieved this. But they've done it for the moral right, because this sounds like no programme any feminists ever wanted.

Avedon Carol, a founding member of Feminists Against Censorship and author of "Nudes, Prudes and Attitudes: Pornography and Feminism", once practised politics, music and journalism in the Washington, DC/Baltimore, Maryland area of the USA for many years before moving to England in 1985 for a life of more politics, more journalism, and noisy desperation.

TERMINAL INCOHERENCE

Walt Hare

In retrospect there was one thing to be said in favour of the Cold War. By concentrating attention on one major 'enemy' it simplified issues.

Now the West has ostensibly 'won' there is a widespread feeling of uncertainty and drift. Governing political parties are accused of not giving a clear lead, and are subject to internal disunities. These are classic symptoms of a 'political vacuum' always, allegedly, 'waiting to be filled'. Free-market economics is a very unlikely candidate for filling this vacuum. Nobody is prepared to die for free trade — they just agree it is a good idea for everybody except their own business.

The political left is struggling to digest the, to them, unpalatable fact that governments — and by implication 'representative democracy' — can never produce the economic prosperity of a free enterprise economy. This is well illustrated by the Labour Party's attempt to rid itself of 'Clause Four' of its constitution.

Paradoxically the so-called Right is perhaps now in more danger than the Left of terminal incoherence of philosophy. There are three major lines of thought developing on the Right, which are mutually

incompatible and a source of confusion and disruption.

Most dangerous, perhaps, are the 'blimp and blue-rinse' brigade who see salvation in the imposition of moral discipline particularly in the form of 'family values'.

Secondly there are the protectionists and isolationists who consider that the best defence against disturbing technological and economic change is restriction both of trade with 'low-wage' countries and immigration from them.

Thirdly some still seriously want to 'roll back the frontiers of the state' particularly by reductions in taxation.

Votes are precious, wherever they come from. It is the attempt to placate all three allegedly right-wing groups which is leading to incoherence and confusion. A bit of get tough with scroungers and criminals here, tighten up on illegal immigrants there, but at the same time press on with privatisation and pretend not to interfere with business. But keep Education and the Health Service plus some other financial black hole social services 'sacrosanct' — which means they are still effectively producer-controlled and their continually increased demands presented as

opportunities for progress instead of evidence of past failure and disappointed promises. The logical inconsistencies here are obvious — if some services

are all that important why should they be left to government which has proved incompetent in so many other activities?

WHAT ETHICAL PROBLEM?

Sean Gabb

Currently in the United Kingdom there are some 10,000 people so ill that, without the expense and hardship of a dialysis machine, they would die. Their one hope of restored health lies in a kidney transplant. Sometimes a donor can be found, but never often enough to meet the full demand; and as progressively fewer die in the first stages of renal failure, so numbers grow of those trapped in the limbo of dialysis.

This may be about to change. A British research team has possibly found a means of suppressing the body's normal tendency to reject non-human tissue. The pig's internal structure is similar to our own, and transplant experiments are already underway. The prospect opens before us of a limitless supply not merely of kidneys, but also of livers, hearts and lungs, and of every other organ or kind of tissue the shape and size of which we have in common with any species of animal nearly related to ourselves. Within five years, the dialysis machine could be as obsolete as the leech. Within 20 years, heart disease might be as fatal as gall-stones.

Reactions though have been oddly unfavourable. The animal rights people we can ignore. It may or may not be that "breeding pigs as living organ banks owes more to sick horror fantasy than medical

science"*. It is certainly consistent with the belief that animals have rights like our own; and no talk of 10,000 kidney patients will or ought to change that belief. But why are the rest of us so apparently worried? Why, for example, is the BMA eager to set up a committee, packed with philosophers and theologians, to consider the ethics of the matter? For most of us, where is the least moral ambiguity in further exploiting the other species? We wear leather shoes and clothes. We eat animals. We test drugs and even perfumes on them. Perhaps all these acts are grossly immoral. We tolerate them nonetheless. How is putting a pig's heart into a man so different?

It differs here: Other food available, no one dies of not eating pork. Pig organ transplants could save lives by the millions. The first is extra to survival, the second essential. All difference is surely for the better. Three minutes' thought would suffice to prove this. But, as A.E. Housman noted, thought is hard and three minutes is a long time.

* "Pig transplants 'by year 2000'", The Times, 20th August, 1994.

Sean Gabb is the Editor of "Free Life".

THE SINGLE CURRENCY

Paul Anderton

The proposal for a single European currency has the superficial attraction of simplicity and economy. To dispense with currency exchange and the expense of intermediaries is obviously a good idea. The opposition seems primarily sentimental. Having one's own currency is widely considered a symbol of national identity, and control of the economy by one's own national government (assumed to be preferable to any other agency).

There is an important neglected aspect though. National currencies have important market effects. One which is particularly important, but very badly understood, is in the influence on foreign trade (i.e. trade in different currencies). This can be simply illustrated by the Chancellor's decision **not** to increase the tax on alcohol in the November 1994 budget. Cheap imports from lower-taxed Continental

supermarkets were causing loss of business and unemployment among British booze-sellers. And increased satisfaction among British booze-consumers.

Say they bought this 'cheapo booze' in France. Whether the French shopkeeper accepted British money or insisted that it first be converted to reliable French francs, the British 'boozer' spends British pounds *and that money ultimately has to be spent back in Britain either by the shopkeeper on a trip himself, or the exchange dealer, or somebody in the system — possibly a multinational corporation as a minor part of some big deal — but that British money has to be spent in Britain eventually, even though its immediate purpose was to get French booze.*

So the idea that spending money abroad 'costs British jobs' is completely mistaken. It might cost

jobs in some particular trade or industry — easy subjects for television cameras and media interviews with redundant workers. The businesses improved and the jobs created by the money spent back in Britain are relatively invisible because they are probably spread over several industries and areas.

In the long run the most efficient industries prosper whether at home or abroad, and the less efficient wither. 'Buying British' for sentimental or supposedly patriotic reasons is not really a help for domestic suppliers — just the reverse if it encourages

them to remain inefficient compared with foreign competitors.

A single currency would eliminate the 'flowback effect' of national currencies. In other words spending money 'abroad' (as it now is anyway) could permanently drain those resources from Britain without replacing them *in Britain*. This does remove a lot of national independence. And a good deal of the 'market forces' effect of correcting weak economies because investment both in capital and labour is attractive because of the weak (cheap) currency.

MILLIONS AND BILLIONS

Walt Hare

Quite often we hear of so many *millions* of pounds being 'saved' as the result of various economies of public expenditure. Quite often these savings also involve some high-profile inconvenience, such as reducing or discontinuing some service such as home-helps, or charging for something previously provided 'free' such as entry to museums.

Practically everybody can grasp how much one million is. You might just win it on the pools or the National Lottery, possibly even some small multiple of that. A fairly well-paid 'executive' or similar might just earn that much in a lifetime (before tax), though most of us won't quite manage it. A lifetime seriously underprivileged could mean survival on a tenth of it.

So when we hear that a few millions had been 'saved' we have roughly some idea of what it means. We can imagine a few worthwhile projects (apart from ourselves) that it might be spent on and are inclined to feel duly pleased by such an achievement.

But in fact even 100 million — way out of the imagination or wildest dreams of affluence for the vast majority — is chickenfeed and peanuts in the total of government expenditure. This amounts to about £300 *billion* — £300 000 000 000 with all the noughts in. The money raised by the notorious fuel tax, for all the fuss it caused, was only expected to be about *half of one percent* of this total — and well under the limits of error in the estimate of expenditure anyhow.

The point of this is that these often considerably publicised 'savings' give a quite false impression of possible tax savings or improved benefits from more efficient use of tax money. [In passing it is worth noting that there is now a sinister omission from ministerial announcements of 'savings'. Even the minuscule odd millions here and there are never presented as a possibility of tax reduction. It is always an opportunity for the money 'saved' to be 'better spent' somewhere else — usually very vaguely on something such as 'schools and hospitals'].

The inescapable fact is that any political party that seriously wants to reduce taxation had better include in its next election manifesto proposals, and detailed plans, for getting the government and its taxpayer finance completely out of vast areas in which it now operates. 'Cracking down on scroungers', 'plugging tax loopholes', 'cutting down administrative waste', are all very laudable but actually no better than mere window-dressing.

Whole ministries and departments need to be closed down completely. Say, at least one per year over the next Parliament. As well as the obvious economic advantage of more extensive *genuine* market influence, there would be great political benefit. With fewer ministries there would be a smaller and more manageable cabinet — and more MPs really devoted to their constituents, and even their own principles, instead of hankering after a government job — and being effectively muzzled if and when they get one.

CHAIRMAN'S NEWS

Mike Plumbe

I've been on 'telly'! The show was 'hosted' by Richard Littejohn on Sky TV at 6.30pm on 5th December. The topic was the promise by the Government to cut back benefit from 'Job Seekers'

who deliberately go for interviews scruffily turned out so they will not be offered work. There were two of us on the panel; the other was a lady from an association of recruitment agencies.

We were none of us on for long enough to express our views fully. I had to confess at the outset that my middle name was 'Scruff'. Also, I mentioned that I myself was made 'unemployed' some 10 years

ago, and that I have survived since by freelance working. To get a 'proper job' at 50+ would have been difficult.

My own line was then that people should be free to dress in whatever way they wish, but that employers equally have the freedom to choose whomever they feel will fit the job best. If employers consider that they want someone smart, then so be it.

The others on the programme rather took the line that people should be advised on the best conduct for interviews, but that financial coercion or sanctions were probably inappropriate. There were a number of telephone calls from viewers. Predictably all of these lambasted the Government for benefit cuts.

It happened that the same day I was contacted by The Union of Unemployed & Workers, a small new union of which I had never heard. They want the right peacefully to march and demonstrate, but are being prevented from so doing by pressure from the TUC. I managed to mention this in the programme. I am still not certain what the SIF stance really is here.

The vexed and difficult topic of employment and the 'right to work', if it exists, is perhaps one we can consider from the SIF point of view in the next issue.

On Identity Cards, my 84-year-old neighbour went to her bank, where she has had her account for 30-odd years, to collect some securities. 'We don't know you', they said. 'Prove your identity, please.' She showed them her 'bus pass (with photo), her library card and another club card. 'That's not what we want. Driving licence?' She has never driven. 'Passport, or bill from a public utility?' She did not have either of these with her, surprise, surprise. So they quizzed her about her standing orders, a technique which has been used on me when cashing a cheque at a 'foreign' branch. On giving correct details, they finally but a bit reluctantly recognised her and gave her documents. What an aggravating palaver. Perhaps we should have identity cards after all? I wonder.

BOOK REVIEWS

SHEPHARD'S WARNING: SETTING SCHOOLS BACK ON COURSE

Antony Flew

[Adam Smith Institute, London, 1994, 161 pp, ISBN 1-873712-47-2. The exact price is not known at the time of this review, but copies will be available from Libertarian Alliance, 25, Chapter Chambers, Esterbrook Street, London SW1 at a substantial discount]

The chief message of this book is that our system of state education is, and has been — for at least the past generation — a disaster. This is not for me either a new or a controversial message. I have long since ceased to be astonished by the illiteracy of many of my students, for whom spelling is the job of their spell checkers, and grammar is as mysterious as modern physics. It is, however, a message that benefits from constant repetition — and that is here communicated with all the moderation of tone and overwhelming demonstration that we have come to expect of its author.

A good example of this is Professor Flew's reply to what has become the standard defence of the present system. Though the hard evidence was hidden from us or tampered with, it had become clear by the 1980s that the state schools were producing a generation as illiterate and innumerate as any in the past 200 years. When forced to recognise this fact, the bureaucrats in charge of the system excused their

failure on two grounds. First, there was a "chronic underfunding" of education. Second, the children in state schools were often unfitted by their backgrounds for any kind of education. Professor Flew replies thus:

First, in 1987, the same reading test was given to black children in a South African school as to students at a sixth form college in the Home Counties. The South African children did better — even though English was in every case their second language, and incomparably less was spent on their education, and they came from incomparably poorer backgrounds (pp. 77-78).

Second, despite all the rhetoric about the "Thatcher cuts", education spending per child increased by 47 per cent in real terms between 1983 and 1993 (p. 12).

There is then no simple proportionality between input of money and output of educational quality — at least, as measured by objective testing. This is a simple truth of economics, stated in any textbook. Indeed, for state education, the only apparent proportionality has been of the inverse kind. And this decline in standards Professor Flew blames firmly on the educational bureaucrats. They have systematically diverted funds from the education of children to the expansion of their own numbers and salaries. Worse than this, they have imposed teaching methods that manifestly do not work, and a syllabus that is often worthless.

I do not see how anyone who reads this book with an open mind can fail to agree with its chief

message. I am less sure about Professor Flew's recommendations. These seem rather gentle in the light of what he has described. There are some disasters so complete and inevitable, that it is pointless to talk of reforming the system responsible for having produced them. State education is an example of this. Opting out and vouchers sound attractive, and ought surely to bring some improvements. However, this disaster is one not only of systems, but also of people. And so long as they continue in place, the people who run our educational bureaucracies will find ways to prevent working-class children from getting a sound education.

But this is not the place for me to sound off about the abolition of state education. It is enough for me to congratulate Professor Flew for a really excellent analysis, and to urge anyone reading this review to buy a copy.

Sean Gabb

(Sean Gabb is visiting lecturer in Politics, University of London. He also edits "Free Life", the quarterly magazine of the Libertarian Alliance.)

TEACHING RIGHT AND WRONG: HAVE THE CHURCHES FAILED?

Robert Whelan (editor)

[IEA, Health and Welfare Unit,
2, Lord North Street, SW1P 3LB. 44pp, £5]

This is a short book by six authors with positive religious convictions, five Christian, one Jewish. The topic is the teaching of morality and civilised behaviour which is accepted as being in crisis at present.

David Green, Director of the Health and Welfare Unit, points out in his foreword that F. A. Hayek recognised that appropriate values and habits essential to a free society 'are not transmitted automatically'. They have to be positively taught and the Churches have traditionally played an important part in this.

The authors have various suggestions about this. Jon Davies wants many more (if not all) schools to become church schools and for childhood to be both re-sacralised and re-criminalised — right and wrong inculcated positively and wrongdoing firmly disapproved of and punished. John Kennedy suggests that the Church should accept the modern desire for hedonism rather than asceticism and try to work out some public ethic recognising the difference between serious and responsible hedonistic pursuits and simple self-indulgence.

Bishop Michael Adie points out that, contrary perhaps to the assumption of the conservative government in its call for more positive moral teaching, the Church's commitment to values such as

justice, compassion, forgiveness and truth might just as likely stimulate criticism of present-day society as endorse it. Rabbi Dr Julian Jacobs insists on individual personal responsibility and that asking 'have the Churches failed?' cannot be a means of suggesting Churches are to blame for the ills of society. David Konstant, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Leeds, is very certain of the Church's mission to proclaim, teach, and itself set an example of Christian virtues in practice. William Wallace draws attention to the economic and social cost of ignoring the Christian values of honesty, abstinence, and fidelity in terms of crime, substance abuse, and AIDS.

In all, a comprehensive brief survey of present religious thought on contemporary moral problems and their practical consequences.

However, there are two serious omissions which make this survey incomplete. One is the Muslim view which is significant for an important minority and, in its fundamentalist form, of potential serious practical significance (e.g. the Salman Rushdie situation).

Even more important is the absence of any humanist or atheist comment. All the contributors are ordained ministers, with the exception of Jon Davies who is in some ways the most reactionary, who insist on the significance of faith in God for moral behaviour. This is, however, by no means certain, as suggested elsewhere in this issue of 'The Individual', and some recognition of the completely non-religious position would have been welcome in the interest of true balance.

Paul R Anderton.

SELF-MADE MAN AND HIS UNDOING

Jonathan Kingdon

[Simon & Shuster Ltd., West Garden Place,
Kendal Street, London W2 2AQ £9.99 (Paperback)
ISBN: 0-671-71260-8]

Most of this book is, to quote the cover, 'The radical reworking of evolution theory'. For those interested in the development of modern mankind from, literally, Eve (one mother in Africa), the book is bound to be most interesting. I myself kept getting confused between the different types of man, in trying to keep some track of the long timescales, and in mapping ancient places against the present world. This masterly work draws together threads from many other studies (as well as those of the author) and presents a convincing history of how different 'races' come to be where they are now.

For members of our Society, the last part of the book is, I suggest, compulsory reading. It demonstrates graphically how man, in his selfishness, is destroying his environment, in terms of both natural and human resources. Whaling, farming (of

animals and crops), deforestation, mining, climatic changes, governments, high finance, waste disposal, and trade agreements (especially GATT), all receive critical and damning examination. This is a disturbing book which needs to be read by all who are interested in man's survival.

Michael Plumbe.

UNDERCLASS: THE CRISIS DEEPENS

Charles Murray & others

[IEA, Health and Welfare Unit, and Sunday Times, 2 Lord North Street, SW1P 3LB. 69pp £5.99. ISBN: 0-255-36355-9]

This short book is one result of Charles Murray's second visit to Britain at the invitation of the Sunday Times. On both occasions he was looking at the developments in social conditions and how they compared with similar situations in America.

His first study suggested that Britain was mirroring America in the development of an 'underclass' of largely welfare-dependent people, concentrated in ghetto areas, and prone to economic decline and moral disintegration. This conclusion was based on the study of the measured values of, and trends in, three key symptoms — crime, illegitimacy, and economic inactivity among working-aged men.

The conclusion is that changes have taken place which have led to nothing short of a revolutionary change in social habits and expectations, particularly the demise of the two-parent family. This is not confined to the lower classes; the upper classes are also involved though for different reasons. The main traditional strength is in the upper middle class and here it is likely to get better. *But the result will be the development of a new class system drastically different from the old one and much more hostile to free institutions.* This last point makes this work particularly interesting, and disturbing, for the SIF.

Mr Murray proposes reforms, the main ones being full employment and a return, with appropriate adjustments for inflation, to the benefit structure much as it was in 1960.

As something of a political activist and mathematician, this book is particularly interesting and satisfying to me. Observing the huge areas of council estates and tower blocks of a large provincial city over the past two decades has provided direct graphic evidence of what Charles Murray has deduced from the statistics. The difference is that personal observation and anecdote can always be dismissed as biased or unscientific, but the numbers are definitely objective.

Nevertheless the IEA invited four commentaries on Murray's research and conclusions from Pete Alcock, Miriam David, Melanie Philips, and Sue

Slipman. They struggle hard to discredit the analysis and maintain the politically correct view that the situation is not as serious as made out, or, alternatively, solvable by more government action (and taxpayers' money) on the lines that have obviously failed already. The reader must of course judge this for himself, but in my opinion (and experience) the evidence is definitely in favour of Charles Murray.

As an example of the desperation of the critics, Sue Slipman challenges the idea, of Murray's, that rapid social change cannot be the prime cause of social breakdown because during the Victorian era of rapid industrialisation illegitimacy actually declined, by asserting that this was because industrialisation created large numbers of jobs which paid for marriages. So the political left's conventional wisdom that 19th century capitalism caused misery and degradation for the working classes is quietly abandoned (at last) in the attempt to refute Murray!

Read this book (about right for a shortish train or plane journey or a spare couple of hours) both for information and as an exercise in critical judgement.

Paul R Anderton.

NUDES, PRUDES, AND ATTITUDES

Avedon Carol

[New Clarion Press, 76, Rosehill Street, Cheltenham, Glos. GL52 6SJ. This is one of the 'Issues in Social Policy' series, ISBN 1-873797-13-3, and is available at £9.95 paperback, £23.50 hardback, from bookshops and the publisher.]

This book should be read by anybody who wants to know the facts about censorship in general and particularly that related to sexual information and so-called pornography. It is well and interestingly written, and includes actual information on some sexual activities which might be presently unknown to some readers.

The main argument is that the recent increased tolerance of censorship and fear of the supposed ill-effects of pornography, by media, politicians, and the general public, is the result of misinformation — much of it from allegedly feminist sources. This is presented clearly and in detail. The idea that pornography 'causes' violence against women is convincingly refuted, and a coherent alternative explanation given of the alleged facts used in this argument. In particular Avedon Carol points out that the actual content of so-called pornographic material is rarely sadistic or violent. In fact it is much more likely to depict ordinary (i.e. not stereotypically 'attractive') women enjoying themselves and adopting a positive role in sexual relations. This is probably the real source of the objection to allegedly corrupting

and subversive material by the so-called 'moral' Right.

This book is essential reading for anybody who needs confidence in countering the largely media and politically supported arguments in favour of censorship — particularly the 'protection of children' trick. It is particularly recommended to liberal

feminists who feel uneasy in defending the no-censorship position because of the supposed harm to women's interests resulting from pornography.

Pauline Henry

OUR CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT WRITES

Mike Plumbe

The unintended contribution of modern government to culture, and particularly the development of language, is often overlooked, and is something for which taxpayers should be duly grateful. It finds something else for the education system to study, for instance. Here is just one modest example.

Noun: Quangocrat

Verb: Quango: I belong to a quango.

Quangare: It takes two, or a dozen or so, to quango.

Quangavi: I have a knighthood or damehood now for services to quangodom (qv)

Quangatun: I had a good dinner last night.

Abrev: qc, pronounced 'cwook' (to rhyme with 'brook') to avoid confusion with QC, said as 'queue-see' and used by others.

Derivatives:

QIY: make your own quango.

Quack-quack: the language of quangocrats.

Quangaloo: mobile collection unit for quango output.

Quangarees: down-to-earth clothing for dirty work.

Quangarese: quack-quack translation for the public.

Quangaroo: a jumped-up official.

Quangarule: a quangocourt ruling from which there is no appeal.

Quangocourt: unofficial body which enforces regulations.

Quangocracy: an ugly word; see quangodom (1).

Quangoculture: organic growth, pesticide resistant, but allowing use of fertilisers.

Quangodom: (1) hell for the rest of us; (2) wild-oats curtailment device.

Quangomatic: laundering (and sanitising) machine.

Quangonomist: one who can't quite live on the pay from quangos, but finds it does rather help.

Quangopomposity: the dignity of a quangocrat.

Quangompost: rotting pile associated with some quangocrats.

Quangorum: the number of quangocrats who have to gather together in one place at one time to justify claiming expenses.

Quangostasis: quangocratic constipation (rare).

Quango-train: all expenses paid.

Quangover: quangocratic celebration party result.

Quangovision: the dream of world-domination by quangocrats.

Quangrave: hi-jinks in a quangocratic burial-ground.

Quangum-mechanics: skill in becoming a quangocrat by being married to, or knowing, someone high in Government circles.

Quank-you: back-hander from a quangocrat.

Quasi-quango: Local Authority Council (has elections).

THE SOCIETY'S NEWS

Wednesday 24th May is the *provisional* date for the Society's **Annual General Meeting** in central London. Confirmation nearer the date.

The Society's Submission on Medical Information to the Council of Europe.

Provisional recommendations on psychiatry and human rights being currently considered by the Council of Europe do not cover lack of warnings about the level of risk faced by patients prescribed tranquillisers, anti-depressants, fertility drugs, ECT, and many other treatments.

The Society has made recommendations that a body of laymen should ensure that scientific studies provide definitive data on degrees of dangerousness and that these studies be made available to doctors

and patients. MPs who signed an Early Day Motion have been sent a copy. Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith MP has sent a copy to the Secretary of State for Health, and Sir Richard Body MP has stated his intention to put down a few questions in the House on this subject.

The Submission has also been noted by Alan Howarth MP, and the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights of the Parliamentary Assembly of Europe. MIND, the pressure group concerned with mental health, say they share our concern over limited knowledge on the part of both doctors and patients about the risks involved in some treatments, and propose taking part in further discussions on this matter with the Society.

Readers will be pleased to know that our only female contributor (at least recently), until this edition, **Patricia Rawlings**, is now **Baroness Rawlings**. She made her maiden speech in the House of Lords during the second day of the Debate on the Address (17th November 1994), about the enlargement of the EU, the interplay of various European cultures, and the need to preserve national identities.

Conservative Party Conference — S.I.F. Fringe Meeting 12 October 1994

A **Fringe Meeting** was organised jointly with the Campaign for Freedom of Information (Director, Maurice Frankel) at the Conservative Party Conference in Bournemouth last October. Our topic was 'Open Government — Fact or Fiction'.

This was a brave 'first time' for our Society. It was successful in that we had excellent speeches. It was less effective than we hoped because the attendance was on the small side, in spite of Paul's efforts at handing out hundreds of leaflets on the days before the meeting. Had it not been for the valiant support of some of our own members, the room would have been disappointingly empty. In fact there were many other fringe meetings on the same evening, and any MP worth his or her salt was in much demand. In our own hotel there was another meeting in the room below ours addressed by the Attorney General on immigration control which was a strong counter-attraction. I found myself standing at the top of the stairs trying to make sure people came to our meeting. By chance I knew some of those wanting to go downstairs, so there was much (friendly?) rivalry and badinage.

Maurice had enlisted the attendance of Alan Howarth MP, who spoke convincingly and in detail of the secrecy surrounding government. Maurice himself spoke of the practical, day-to-day effect of the

impingement of government control on our lives. Peter Wakley and Peter Jackson, of our Committee, then took up the theme. Peter Wakley's topic was the way in which freedom of movement is curtailed and monitored by Government. Peter Jackson campaigned for patients to be given medical information as a right, if wanted. I think we shall be hearing more of the two Peters as spokesmen for the Society.

A debate followed, mainly on the need or otherwise for Identity Cards. I confess to sparking this off somewhat mischievously as Meeting Chairman, as it is a topic dear to my heart. It is amazing to me how so many people are fooled into believing strongly that Identity Cards are a GOOD IDEA. Our debate grew quite heated at times.

Whether or not the direct expense of around £75 (half the total shared with CFI), and the expenses, effort and time spent by Society members, were really worth the result is debatable. However, we gained valuable experience in mounting such events, and, when we have a cause to put to Government, a Party conference is an obvious place to be. Probably we did draw the attention of some 'decision makers' to matters which badly need addressing. Certainly in the audience there were one or two people with influence, including someone from a consumers' organisation and another involved with security. So, maybe we did some good.

If we arrange another fringe meeting, I must make sure our own MP members are involved early enough (I was late inviting them), so they have a chance to put in an appearance if they can.

Our grateful thanks are to be recorded to Paul Anderton (organiser), Alan Howarth MP, Maurice Frankel, Peter and Hilary Jackson, Jenny and Peter Wakley, Rhoda Zeffertt, and other Society members for their help and support.

M. Plumbe

NOTICES

The Institute of Economic Affairs is holding a one-day conference on "The Good Samaritan and the Welfare State" as part of its 'Religion and Liberty' theme on Monday 20th March 1995, 10.00am to 5.00pm at the Methodist Central Hall, Storey's Gate, London, SW1. Further details from Rebecca Connorton, IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 2 Lord North Street, London SW1P 3LB.

Free Life is a quarterly journal devoted entirely to discussion of issues concerned with freedom/liberty, edited by Sean Gabb, a contributor to *The Individual*. Contents are mostly in-depth discussions of classical liberal and libertarian ideas. Subscription £10 per year from Libertarian Alliance,

25, Chapter Chambers, Esterbrooke Street, London, SW1P 4NN. Tel: 0171-821-5502.

The Anti-Maastricht Alliance's Red Lion talks resume for the first half of 1995 with the following programme. All talks will be given in the Red Lion pub in Whitehall (near the Parliament Square end), are on **Wednesdays**, and will start at **7pm**. For further information please contact Dr Helen Szamuely on 0181-740 7194 (voice and fax).

11 January: **Fools' Gold: the single currency**
Ian Milne, Director, European Foundation

15 February: **The Balkan crisis and the European Union**
Dr Noel Malcolm, journalist and historian

15 March: **The European Union and defence**

James Sherr, Lecturer in International Relations,
Lincoln College

12 April: **Economic Alternatives to the European Union**

Dr Brian Burkitt, Bradford economist

17 May: **The European Union and the collapse of the
Soviet Union**

Dr Mark Almond, Oxford historian

14 June: **The fate of democracy in an age of wasteful
bureaucrats**

Prof. Kenneth Minogue, London School of Economics

The Power to Destroy

THE POWER TO DESTROY: a study of the British tax system, by D.R. Myddelton, is a devastating analysis of how taxes reduce the freedom of the individual and the creation of wealth. Published last year, it offers radical proposals to reduce taxation and public expenditure so as to increase freedom, wealth and welfare.

"I strongly commend Professor Myddelton's stimulating review of the continuing, widely damaging cost of government as the starting-point of a long-overdue national debate on the urgent need to restore wealth-creation above sterile 'redistribution' as the only lasting remedy for the most pressing economic, as well as social, problems." *Lord Harris of High Cross*.

"In 1950 as an average taxpayer you worked for two and a half weeks each year to pay your income tax. Today it is two and a half months. That's called progressive taxation. David Myddelton shows just how damaging the tax structure is to our economy: stifling incentive and growth; channelling our money into all the wrong things. This book should be read by everyone who has received either a pay slip or a tax demand and fumed about the amount being grabbed by the taxman." *Teresa Gorman MP*.

The 112-page book carries a foreword by our President, Lord Monson, and is written in a clear and witty style. It is completed with notes, references, a name index and a subject index. The hardback version is £9.95 a copy, while the paperback is £6.95 a copy, post-free from the Society for Individual Freedom at the address given below.

The Individual

Views expressed in *The Individual* are not necessarily those of the editor or of the Society but are printed as a contribution to debate. Letters are welcome, as are articles. All contributions should be sent to the editor: Paul Anderton, 15 Norfolk Park Drive, Sheffield S2 3QG.

The annual subscription for membership of the Society is £12. Those under 21 years of age may pay £6 (date of birth required). Cheques payable to the Society. A leaflet about the Society is available on request. Ask for a form for a banker's order if you would like to pay in this way.

Society for Individual Freedom

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